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B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
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	EB-00	EXIM-01	E-00	FAAE-00	VC-00	FRB-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	CAC-00
	VCE-00	AC-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OIC-02	OMB-01
	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9632
INFO WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPLOMATIC POST PRIORITY
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
USINT HAVANA PRIORITY
USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000187

TREASURY FOR OASIA/INL - AARON JONES
NCS FOR LLORENS
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI - ULLIRICH AND PORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2013
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TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, ASEC, CASC, OAS, VE
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: POLITICAL UPDATE: JANUARY 23, 2003

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.5(B)
AND (D)

SUMMARY:

1. -- (C) THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,S PERMANENT COMMISSION ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL COMMISSION TO
INVESTIGATE THE NATIONAL GUARD,S SEIZURE OF COCA COLA
PRODUCTS FROM THE CARABOBO BOTTLING PLANT.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(B), 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 6 JUN 2027
DATE/CASE ID: 08 MAR 2007 200503244

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-- (C) PRESIDENT CHAVEZ, RIDING ATOP A TRUCK, TRIUMPHANTLY ARRIVED AT A MEGA DEMONSTRATION ORGANIZED BY SUPPORTERS IN CARACAS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE OVERTHROW OF DICTATOR GEN. PEREZ JIMENEZ. THE OPPOSITION STAGED DOZENS OF SIMULTANEOUS ANTI-GOV DEMONSTRATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING MARCHES IN EACH OF THE COUNTRY,S 23 STATE CAPITALS.

-- (U) ALFREDO AVELLA, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE), DENOUNCED THE JANUARY 22 DECISION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) THAT SUSPENDED THE NON-BINDING REFERENDUM ON PRESIDENT CHAVEZ,S RULE. AVELLA CALLED ON DIPLOMATS TO TAKE UP THE ISSUE.

-- (U) IN AN ADDRESS (CARRIED ON ALL RADIO AND TELEVISION CHANNELS BY LAW) LATE JANUARY 22, PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ TOLD
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THE NATION THAT THE FRIENDS GROUP SHOULD BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE ALGERIA, CHINA, RUSSIA AND FRANCE.

-- (U) THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) ANNOUNCED THE CONSTITUTION,S ARTICLE 350 CAN NOT/NOT BE USED TO JUSTIFY THE DISREGARD OF DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED PUBLIC POWERS.

-- (C) A NATIONAL GUARD (NG) COLONEL HAS FILED A FORMAL COMPLAINT DENOUNCING THE RECENT BEHAVIOR OF THE NG. THIS IS THE FIRST PUBLIC SIGN OF DISSENT IN THE GUARD,S SENIOR COMMAND SINCE SEVERAL SENIOR OFFICERS DECLARED THEMSELVES IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN NOVEMBER 2002.

-- (C) IN A MOVE DECRIED BY LOCAL CIVIL AUTHORITIES, ARMY OFFICERS CONDUCTED A SURPRISE INSPECTION OF THE STATE POLICE BARRACKS IN CARABOBO

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-- (C) THE PRESIDENT OF THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEV), BLUNTLY REJECTED AN OFFICIAL DEMAND FROM THE GOV TO CEASE "INTERFERING IN POLITICAL LIFE."

END SUMMARY.

LEGISLATORS TO INVESTIGATE COCA COLA SEIZURE

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2. (C) THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,S PERMANENT COMMISSION ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT JANUARY 22 ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL
COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE NATIONAL GUARD,S SEIZURE OF
COCA COLA PRODUCTS FROM THE PANAMCO BOTTLING PLANT IN
CARABOBO IN MID-JANUARY.

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MARCHES ACROSS THE NATION

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	VCE-00	AC-01	DCP-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00	USIE-00	ASDS-00
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DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
USINT HAVANA PRIORITY
USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY

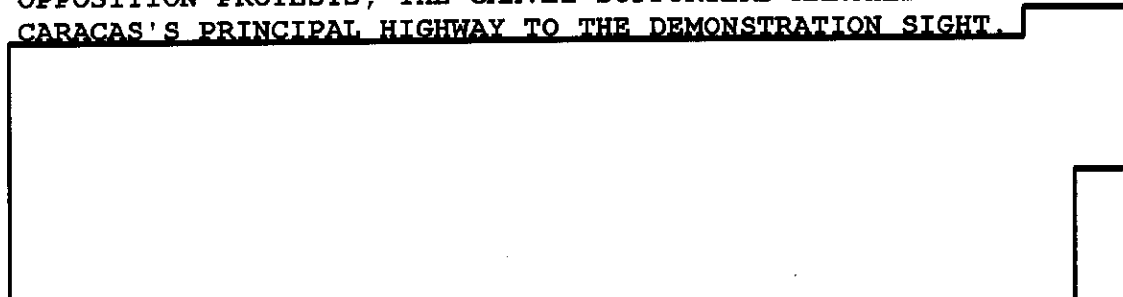
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 CARACAS 000187

TREASURY FOR OASIA/INL - AARON JONES
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3. (C) THE GOV AND OPPOSITION EACH STAGED MARCHES AND DEMONSTRATIONS JANUARY 23, ALTHOUGH ORGANIZERS PURPOSELY ENSURED THEY DID NOT COME INTO CONTACT. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ, RIDING ATOP A TRUCK, ARRIVED AT THE DEMONSTRATION IN CARACAS TO ADDRESS SUPPORTERS. PRO-GOV ORGANIZERS PROVIDED TRANSPORTATION TO BRING IN SUPPORTERS FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE COUNTRY TO AVENIDA BOLIVAR IN DOWNTOWN CARACAS. MIMICKING OPPOSITION PROTESTS, THE CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS MARCHED DOWN CARACAS'S PRINCIPAL HIGHWAY TO THE DEMONSTRATION SIGHT.



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SUPPORTERS, INCLUDING VICE PRESIDENT JOSE RANGEL, CHANTED PRO-GOV SLOGANS AND REPEATED CHAVEZ'S CHARGES THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION ARE &TERRORISTS& AND &COUP-MONGERS.& IN ONE CASE, DEMONSTRATORS TORE DOWN A BANNER ON THE HIGHWAY WHICH HAD BEEN USED BY OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS TO COUNT DOWN THE DAYS UNTIL THE NON-BINDING REFERENDUM THAT HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 2.

4. (U) FEARING VIOLENCE, OPPOSITION ORGANIZERS HAD URGED ANTI-GOV DEMONSTRATORS IN CARACAS TO STAY IN THEIR HOMES TO
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AVOID CONTACT WITH THE CHAVISTA EVENT. NOT TO BE OUTDONE BY THE GOV MARCH IN CARACAS, THE OPPOSITION STAGED DOZENS OF SIMULTANEOUS ANTI-GOV DEMONSTRATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING MARCHES IN EACH OF THE COUNTRY'S 23 STATE CAPITALS. NO VIOLENCE OR CONFRONTATIONS WERE REPORTED BY MID-AFTERNOON JANUARY 23.

CNE DECRIES SUPREME COURT DECISION; JUDGE MAY RESIGN

5. (C) IN A JANUARY 23 STATEMENT, ALFREDO AVELLA, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE), DENOUNCED THE JANUARY 22 DECISION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) THAT SUSPENDED THE NON-BINDING REFERENDUM ON PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S RULE. AVELLA SAID THE COURT'S DECISION DENIED THE PEOPLE THEIR HUMAN RIGHT TO VOTE AND CALLED ON DIPLOMATS IN EMBASSIES IN VENEZUELA, THE UNITED NATIONS, THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES, AND THE NEWLY FORMED GROUP OF FRIENDS TO TAKE UP THE ISSUE. AVELLA SAID THE COURT'S DECISION VIOLATED THE SEPARATION OF POWERS AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE GUARANTEED UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, AND URGED VENEZUELANES TO DEFEND THEIR RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REFERENDUM WITH THEIR HEARTS AND HANDS.8

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CHAVEZ STILL LOOKING FOR MORE FRIENDS

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6. (U) IN AN ADDRESS (CARRIED ON ALL RADIO AND TELEVISION CHANNELS BY LAW) LATE JANUARY 22, PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ TOLD THE NATION THAT THE FIRST THING THE FRIENDS GROUP SHOULD DO IS TO RECOGNIZE THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT IN VENEZUELA AND DECLARE THAT THERE ARE NOT TWO FORCES IN THE COUNTRY WITH THE SAME LEGITIMACY. CHAVEZ SAID HE FACES AN OPPOSITION OF WHICH &COUP MONGERS8 ENJOY THE GREATEST SUPPORT OF THE MEDIA. CHAVEZ SAID THE FRIENDS SHOULD BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE ALGERIA, CHINA, RUSSIA AND FRANCE. HE FINISHED THE ADDRESS WITH SEVERAL PHRASES IN BROKEN ENGLISH, ALLUDING TO HIS "FRIEND" JIMMY CARTER, SAYING &NOTHING OUTSIDE THE CONSTITUTION, EVERYTHING INSIDE THE CONSTITUTION." THE ADDRESS FOLLOWED A HARD-LINE SPEECH BY CHAVEZ AT FT. TIUNA AT THE FORMAL CEREMONY INSTALLING GENERAL GARCIA CARNEIRO AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMY.

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HIGH COURT LIMITS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

7. (U) THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) ANNOUNCED ANOTHER CONTROVERSIAL DECISION JANUARY 22 WHEN IT ISSUED AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSTITUTION, S ARTICLE 350. THE COURT SAID THE ARTICLE CAN NOT/NOT BE USED TO JUSTIFY THE DISREGARD OF DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED PUBLIC POWERS. THE DECISION HAS

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	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00

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BEEN DENOUNCED BY SOME CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERTS WHO ASSERT THE IT FLIES IN THE FACE OF THE ARTICLE,S PLAIN WORDING AND IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. (COMMENT: SOME IN THE OPPOSITION, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HOPING THE MILITARY WOULD COME OUT OF THEIR GARRISONS AND RESCUE VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY, ASSERTED THAT ARTICLE 350 GUARANTEED THE RIGHT TO REBELLION IF A GOVERNING REGIME VIOLATED DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS.)

NATIONAL GUARD COLONEL AIRS HIS DISCONTENT

8. (C) NATIONAL GUARD (NG) COLONEL CARLOS MENDEZ REPORTEDLY HAS SUBMITTED A FORMAL COMPLAINT TO THE NG,S OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL, IN WHICH HE DENOUNCES THE RECENT BEHAVIOR OF THE NG AND ASKS TO BE TRANSFERRED OUT OF THE GUARD,S SECOND REGIONAL COMMAND. MENDEZ,S COMPLAINT ALLEGEDLY ATTACKS THE NG FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE PEOPLE AND SERIOUS BREACHES IN MILITARY DUTY. MENDEZ ALSO DECRIES THE MILITARY,S TREATMENT OF DISSENTING NG GENERAL CARLOS ALFONZO MARTINEZ. ALFONZO IS CURRENTLY UNDER HOUSE ARREST AT FORT TIUNA IN SPITE OF A COURT RULING ORDERING HIS RELEASE. (COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST PUBLIC SIGN OF DISSENTION IN THE NATIONAL GUARD,S SENIOR COMMAND SINCE MARTINEZ AND SEVERAL SENIOR OFFICERS DECLARED THEMSELVES IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN NOVEMBER 2002. [REDACTED])

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ARMY PERFORMS SURPRISE INSPECTION OF CARABOBO POLICE

9. (C) IN A MOVE DECRIED BY LOCAL CIVIL AUTHORITIES, ARMY OFFICERS CONDUCTED A SURPRISE INSPECTION OF THE STATE POLICE BARRACKS IN CARABOBO JANUARY 23. THE INSPECTION WAS REPORTEDLY PERFORMED BY ELEMENTS OF THE ARMY UNIT COMMANDED BY COLONEL CARLOS FRANCO ASCANIO, A STAUNCH SUPPORTER OF PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ. [REDACTED]

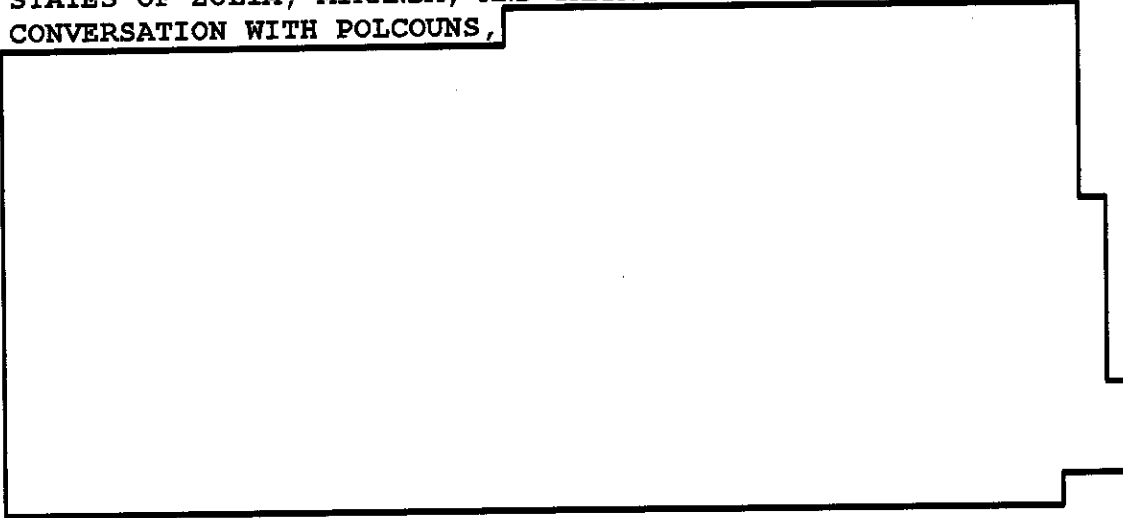
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[REDACTED] CARABOBO GOVERNOR HENRIQUE SALAS FEO DENOUNCED THE ARMY,S SURPRISE VISIT AS THE FIRST

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MOVE IN A PLAN TO SEIZE CONTROL OF THE STATE POLICE AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE COMMAND OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES. SALAS ALLEGED THAT THE ARMY HAD SIMILAR PLANS IN THE NEIGHBORING STATES OF ZULIA, MIRANDA, AND YARACUY. IN A JANUARY 23 CONVERSATION WITH POLCOUNS,



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BISHOP SAYS HE WILL NOT BE SILENCED BY CHAVEZ

10. (C) ON JANUARY 22, BALTAZAR PORRAS, ARCHBISHOP OF MERIDA AND PRESIDENT OF THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEV), BLUNTLY REJECTED AN OFFICIAL DEMAND FROM THE GOV TO CEASE "INTERFERING IN POLITICAL LIFE." PORRAS WAS RESPONDING TO A JANUARY 22 LETTER FROM GONZALO GONZALES VISCAYA, THE DIRECTOR FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE, IN WHICH GONZALES ALLEGED THAT SOME CATHOLIC CLERICS WERE INVOLVED IN "POLITICAL PROSELYTISM." PORRAS DISMISSED THE LETTER AS "A PITIFUL ATTEMPT TO SILENCE US."



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